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Peabody. Address at the consecration of
Springfield cemetery. 1841

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ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT THE

CONSECRATION

OF THE

SPRINGFIELD CEMETERY,

SEPTEMBER 5th, 1841.

BY WILLIAM B. O. PEABODY.



SPRINGFIELD.

PRINTED BY WOOD AND HUFF.

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V



*Address of the  
Cemetery, Providence  
Rhode Island*

It is because the writer is assured that this Address may have a little effect to aid the interests of the Cemetery, that he consents to its publication. The hasty and extemporaneous form in which it appears, is owing to the circumstance, that it was not fully written out till after it was delivered.

## ADDRESS.

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WE have long been endeavoring to secure a fit resting place for our dead. And now, having succeeded in this enterprise—having found a place, in every respect, grateful to our feelings—we are come,—with solemn service, on the day of rest—to implore on our place of rest the blessing of our God.

When I saw this great audience just now, winding up through the glades of the Cemetery to take their places on this ground, I was deeply affected with the thought, how soon we shall take our places in the dust below. With this deep thought upon our minds—with these hills and vallies around us—in presence of these venerable trees and these sparkling waters—with the green earth beneath, and God's own bright sky above us—I need not ask your attention—I need not labor to bring you to solemnity ; for I doubt not that a voice is now saying in every heart, “the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.”

The feeling which leads us to respect the dead—the same feeling which brings us here to day, is found in every age and country ; aye, in every man, who deserves the name of man. The rough soldier, at the

grave of his comrade, feels this strong emotion, and becomes a better man for the time; the seaman, as he leans over the side of his vessel, to watch the plunge of his shipmate's corpse in the waters, becomes more thoughtful than ever he was before. And ye yourselves do know, that, in every funeral, where the dead lies out before the living, with an air of mysterious reserve upon his brow—with an unsearchable depth of expression which no living eye can read—he is invested, for the time, with the stern majesty of death, and every heart does willing homage to his power.

Nor does this reverence cease when the dead are hidden from our eyes. It follows them to the grave, and makes us regard as sacred the place where we have laid them. The burial place is the favorite retreat of the thoughtful; it calms all troubled feelings—it is the place where many holy lives begin—where the unfortunate are most reconciled to this world, and the gay most concerned for the other. When our friends depart, we hang over these places with profound interest, because here it is that we lose them. Up to this place we can follow them, through all changes of joy and sorrow, of life and death. But “hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther” is written on the portal of the tomb. Here is the boundary, beyond which they cannot return—beyond which we cannot go. No wonder then that it chains attention; it is like the spot in the ocean, where we have seen some gallant ship go down.

And now I say, it is nature—that is—the God of nature, who inspires this feeling in the human breast. I have heard some men say, that they care not what becomes of their remains when they are gone. It may be so—they may say so of themselves if they will. But if they say that they care not what becomes of the remains of their friends when they are gone, their hearts are not in the right place; I should doubt if they had friends—I should know that they did not deserve them. Indifference to these things is not natural to any good mind or heart. Nature says, “Bury me with my fathers.” The feeling which nature dictates is, “that I may die in mine own city, and be buried by the grave of my father and my mother.”

It is true the soul is more than the body; the condition of the soul which has gone into eternity is infinitely more important than that of the tenement of clay which it leaves behind. But whoever truly cares for the one will also care for the other. Whoever follows with his heart the friend who has gone into eternity, will surely have some regard to the place where that friend's remains are laid. Why is the body cared for? Is it not because it has been for a time the dwelling of the soul? This reason will be sufficient to keep any one who values the soul from treating it with the least disdain. Have you not known, how, when a friend departs, every thing that has been connected with him becomes consecrated in your eyes? The letters he wrote, the dress he wore, the books

he read—every thing is a sacred memorial to the surviving. Surely then, the mortal frame which the soul has once illuminated with light and love—the mortal frame, where the soul has beamed from the eye, breathed from the lips, and shone like a glory on the brow,—surely the remains deserve to be treasured; and I neither envy nor respect the man who can treat them with light regard.

Do you say that this feeling grows out of refinement? that it springs from cultivation, not from nature? To this I have a reply. The land on which we dwell was possessed by a different race two hundred years ago. There is reason to believe that their camps were stationed, and their council fires burned on a part of this very ground. That wild race was never equalled by any civilized people, in their attachment to the grave and the memory of their fathers. Was this refinement in them? Was it not rather a natural feeling, which all their barbarism had never been able to extinguish?

Let me ask too, what portion of a civilized community manifest this feeling in its greatest strength? Is it the refined, as they are called? or is it those who are more true to nature? Who are they who make it so dangerous to violate the grave? Let an insult be offered to the tomb, and all the roughest elements of the community are up in arms. They say that the living can protect themselves; but they must guard the slumbers of the defenceless dead. So far from

refinement being the parent of these feelings, it rather tends to weaken and destroy them. Silver and gold may be refined till they are fit for no useful purpose, and serve only for ornament and show ; and so man may be refined till he becomes cold and heartless—till all generous impulses and affections forsake his breast forever.

But you ask, if this feeling is natural, why has it not done more to improve the outward aspect of the grave? I answer, this is the province of taste ; and it does not follow, that because the feeling of respect for the dead is strong, it shall manifest itself in this way ; though, in coming days, there is encouragement to hope that it will. The proper taste has been inspired ; it is spreading fast and far ; the time is not distant, when Mount Auburn, which for years was almost alone, will be the mother of a thousand fair cities of the dead. It is not so now. In most parts of our land, the burial place is another name for desolation. Its walls, if it has any, are broken down ; its monuments are leaning with neglect, not with age—as if they were weary of bearing inscriptions which no one comes to read ; there is no relief to the eye but the rank grass in summer, and the aster and golden-rod in autumn, which nature spreads there as if in shame for the living and compassion for the dead. In such places, every one feels ashamed of his race ; every one feels that the living are unjust and unworthy. Why, the very dog, who has been faithful to his master, deserves a more honored grave.

And now let me say, that religion strongly testifies to the power of this natural feeling. If I would know what will affect the human heart, the Bible is the authority to which I go. There we find it written that God determined to separate the sons of the patriarchs as a peculiar people. They were then wanderers by habit and profession ; it was necessary that they should give up their roving, and settle quietly down in the limits of the promised land. And this was done. Hard as it is to change the manners of a people, in the case of the Hebrews this was so thoroughly done, that these hereditary wanderers became renowned through all the nations, for the depth of their attachment to their father-land. In the captivity, by the rivers of Babylon, when their conquerors respectfully desired to hear their far-famed minstrelsy, the songs of Zion were so full of recollections of their country, that it almost broke their hearts to sing them. They hanged their harps on the weeping willows, and could not strike them again. Their feeling is expressed by one of their prophets, in the words, "Weep not for the dead, neither bemoan him ; but weep for him that goeth away : for he shall return no more, nor see his native country."

And how was this great change accomplished ? It was done by means of this feeling of respect for the dead. It was done by anchoring the affections of the children to the graves of their fathers. From the earliest ages, all who dwelt near to God took an interest in this subject, resolved that the body, which

had once been the dwelling of the soul, should not, like common dust, be trodden under foot of men. When Jacob was dying in Egypt, he could not bear the thought of being laid to rest in the distance and solitude of a foreign land. Joseph, too, bound his children by a promise, that his remains should be borne to the sepulchre of his fathers. This feeling grew and gained strength among them, till it destroyed all inclination to wander—till it was the heart's desire and prayer of the dying Hebrew, that his ashes might mingle, dust to dust, with his own, his native land.

We should not have expected to find the true taste in times so ancient; nor should we find it in any except the patriarchs and those whose souls were lighted from on high. But we do trace, in those early ages, the same taste which now begins to prevail among ourselves—the same desire to bring trees and flowers, to remove the dreariness of the place of death. When Abraham bought the fields of Machpelah for a Cemetery, he secured the right to all the trees that were in it, and all that grew on its borders. The sepulchre of our Saviour, too, was in a garden—a place where trees spread their shade above, and flowers breathed incense from their little urns below—a place not distant from the city, and yet not so near, that the noise and business of the living should disturb the silence of the grave. Not anticipating that their Master would rise, they laid him in a place to which they might come in peace and loneliness, to meditate and remem-

ber, and where pilgrims in after times might resort, to be strengthened and inspired by the memory of that great friend of man.

The religion of Jesus tends to confirm the feeling of which I speak. It gives us reason to believe that the departed are living—gone from this world, indeed, but not from existence,—living in some province of creation, where it is not given us to know. If it be so, they must look back with deep interest on all the scenes through which they traveled in their pilgrimage below. And if, from their bright abodes, they look down on their own neglected graves, must there not be sorrow in heaven? But no! Sorrow can never enter to disturb the untroubled calm above. Let me ask rather, will there not be joy in heaven if they can see that their resting place is honored? and that memorials are planted there by affectionate hands? It will assure them, not merely that they are remembered, but that their surviving friends are faithful, both to the dead and the living, and that they are preparing to meet them in their Father's house on high.

But I am going beyond your patience and my own strength; I will therefore bring the subject directly home to ourselves.

We have made arrangements to leave the burial place of our fathers. The opening of that small grave yonder was the act by which we bade it farewell. We have done it from necessity and not from choice.

If I am told that there is room there yet, I answer, it is true ; we may bury our dead there if we will. But if we lay our heart's treasure there to day, the stranger may be laid at his side to-morrow ; and thus they who have been united in life, must be separated in death. Surely every heart will confess that it ought not so to be.

The place "where the rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep," was originally chosen with true taste and feeling. It was so near the village, that the mourner might follow his dead on foot, as the mourner should, if God gives him strength ; at the same time it was so distant as to leave the place in silence and repose. When I came here, twenty years since, it was my favorite resort, at morning, at evening, and sometimes at midnight hours. It was peaceful—it was beautiful—on one side the eye wandered over the two spires, which were all that then rose in the village, to the high walls of the valley, crowned with the dark pine wood. On the other side, it fell upon the bright stream, with the green fringe upon its borders, where there was seldom even a dashing oar to break the smoothness of the tide. But as the village grew, the place was changed. The sounds of busy life came near ; the noise of men, on the fields and the waters, was brought into painful contrast with the stillness of the grave. And now, for years, we have heard the quick steps of improvement, as it is called, trampling like a war-horse round it, impatient to tread it down. When Jerusalem was about to fall, a voice was heard at midnight in the temple, saying, "let us de-

part ;” and when I have been, in the dead of night, at the place of which I speak, it required little fancy to hear a voice, saying to the sleepers, “ arise and depart, for this is not your rest ; the place where the living buy and sell is no longer a home for you.”

Suffer me to congratulate you now, on the success which has attended this enterprise from its beginning to the present hour. Seven years since I presented this subject to all whom my voice could reach. I did so, at the desire of a daughter of this village, who was deeply interested in its welfare ; but before her purpose could be accomplished, she was called away ; and from necessity she was borne to the very place where she could not bear that the remains of her friends should lie. Last year, another effort was made—by those, whom, if they were not present, I might name with the praise which they deserve. The means to conduct the enterprise have been liberally supplied by those who could have no hope of gain, nor even requital for the efforts and sacrifices they made. There were some, who would have selected a different place ; but with that generosity which it is more common to hear of than to see, they gave up their own preferences, and showed that they cared for nothing but the general good. Have we not reason to hope that this will be secured ? Nature has made this place beautiful, and the purpose for which it is now set apart will make it an attractive and delightful resort in every state of feeling—to the sorrowful and the happy—to the aged and the young. I am persuaded that nothing has been done in this village since its

history began, which will tend so much to improve and refine it, as what you are doing now. Observe that small fountain, whose sweet voice you hear ! It gathers the streams, which formerly ran unseen through the meadow, and lifts them up to the eye in graceful silver falls. And in like manner this place and this enterprise will assemble streams of good taste and feeling which formerly ran to waste, and from them produce results which shall be grateful to every eye, and inspiring to every heart. When the native of this town, after long absence, returns to the home of his fathers, he will walk the streets, and all whom he meets there will be strangers ; he will inquire concerning familiar dwellings, and the names of their inhabitants will be new ; when he meets his old acquaintance, he will find that they know not the Joseph of former days. He will be forlorn and solitary among the living, and will not feel at home till he comes to the mansions of the dead. Here he will find the guardians and the playmates of former years ; here will be all whom he used to reverence and love ; and here his heart will overflow with emotions, such as no tongue can adequately tell.

Reflect how many tenants will soon be here, to claim their freehold in the dust below. One fair and gentle child has already come—a fitting herald to take possession in the name of all the dead. Here he has laid himself down on a colder pillow than a mother's breast. Many such will soon be here—morning stars quenched in the brightness of their rising—before they have known the stains and sorrows

of life below. Children, in tender years will follow their parents to this place; the domestic circle will be fearfully broken, and thenceforth the wide world will be their home. The husband will follow the wife—the light and joy of his desolated home; and the wife the husband, on whose strong arm she had hoped to lean through all her days. The young, sinking under the slow torture of wasting disease, will flee away and be at rest in this holy ground; the aged, after years of labor and sorrow, will depart to this place in peace. The pale marbles will rise everywhere around us, telling of the dead, sometimes what they were, but still oftener what they ought to have been.

We are here to day to consecrate these grounds. And we o consecrate them in the name of “Him that liveth, and was dead.” We consecrate them to the service of our heavenly Father—to the influences of his Spirit—to the kingdom of his Son. We consecrate them to the sacred repose of the dead, and the religious improvement of the living; we consecrate them to all kind affections—to heavenward hopes—to the tears of love—to the consolation of grief. We consecrate them to the growth of Christain principles—to the power of Christian emotions. Heaven has made it a land of streams and fountains, a land of vallies and hills; and now may a stronger and deeper interest be given to it than beauty can ever bestow; and may the blessing of God be upon it from the beginning to the end of the year.

But when we consecrate this place in the Saviour’s

name, it should remind us of the promises of the gospel. Many of us have been at his table, to commemorate his dying love to-day. When he sat, with his disciples, at the last supper, the bread and the wine passed untasted by him ; he said that he would not share them again till they met in the kingdom of God. So then, happy meetings were yet before them, and that parting was not the last. What a world of bright promise to the faithful do those simple words bestow. It spreads out in a thousand forms of hope, each one of which is a ray of glory to some afflicted heart. The mother for example—the Rachel weeping for her children, but not refusing to be comforted, because she has surrendered them to her Father and their Father, to her God and their God,—she may lift up her eyes and look forward to the time when she shall go to those who cannot return to her—when they shall be the first to meet her at heaven's gate, and with bright and glad voices, bid her welcome to their own happy home.

“ O, when the mother meets on high  
The babe she lost in infancy,—  
Hath she not then, for all her fears,  
The day of woe, the sleepless night,  
For all her sorrows, all her tears,  
An over-payment of delight ? ”

But the hour is wasting ; I see by the lengthening shadows that the sun is sinking low. I see that some, who, when I began to speak, were in the sunshine, are now in the evening shade. And some, who are now in the full sunshine of prosperity and gladness, will soon be covered with the awful shadow of death. We shall soon leave this ground—never again thus to

assemble, till we meet in the dust below. The day is going down ; the darkness of night will soon settle on these hills and vales. The season is declining ; the red leaf is already hung as a signal from the tree, and the winds of autumn will soon be heard singing their vesper hymn. The year is waning ; the trumpet of the winter storms will soon be sounded ; they will sweep through these leafless woods, and rush and howl over the habitations of death. Let us feel then, for it is true, that every fading year—every fall of the leaf—every closing day, and every toll of the funeral bell is measuring our dead march to the grave.

Let us prepare then, since, prepared or not, we must go. Let us have the only preparation that can avail us in the dying hour. Let us “so number our days as to apply our hearts unto wisdom.” Let us say to Him who made us, “The grave cannot praise thee ; death cannot celebrate thee ; but the living, the living, he shall praise thee as we do this day.” May we so spend our days in his service, that, in the hour which is not far from any one of us, we may look forward with hopes full of immortality ; and when the cares of this short life are over, through Him who lived, and labored, and died upon the cross to save us, may we serve him in nearer presence, and with angels’ powers on high,







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